



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
DARRELL V. MCGRAW, JR.
CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION
1-800-368-8808 or 304-558-8986

Press Release

From The Daily Athenaeum

<http://www.da.wvu.edu/XMLParser/printstory.phtml?id=25110>

DECEMBER 8, 2006

Veterans honor the USS West Virginia, Pearl Harbor

By Gary A. Harki
Staff Writer

The blue-gray mast that stands on the muddy hillside in front of Oglebay Hall looks out of place.

Once, it was part of a battleship that helped fight the Japanese in World War II; now it simply serves as a reminder to all who know its story.

It's a story that began on Dec. 7, 1941, when the U.S.S. West Virginia was one of five battleships sunk in Pearl Harbor during an attack that left about 2,400 Americans dead.

West Virginia Attorney General Darrell McGraw, along with a handful of students, veterans and ROTC members, held a ceremony in front of the Mountainlair on Thursday to honor the memory of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

"We lost brother veterans that day; that is as plain as I can put it," said Gary Burch, a member of VFW 9916 and a Vietnam veteran.

The USS West Virginia took six 18-inch torpedo hits and two 15-inch bombs during the attack on Pearl Harbor, according to usswestvirginia.org, a Web site about the ship's history. The West Virginia's commanding officer, Capt. Mervyn S. Bennion, was killed on the deck by a bomb fragment and was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

The ship was abandoned and sank to the bottom of the harbor, but it did not stay there. The decision was made by the navy to raise the ship and repair it. During the repairs, the bodies of 70 sailors who had been trapped in the sinking ship were found, according to the Web site. Due to an air pocket that formed in the ship, sailors were able to stay alive, but rescue workers were unable to get to them in time. Also found was a calendar with the last date marked off as Dec. 23.

The ship was eventually hauled to Puget Sound Navy Yard at Bremerton, Wash.

In October of 1944, the ship was at last ready for battle, fighting in the Philippines, including the battles for Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

The mast that now stands in front of Oglebay Hall exists as a symbol of the cost of liberty, said McGraw, who as West Virginia University's student body president in 1960, was instrumental in getting the mast for WVU.

"Pearl Harbor and the battles of World War II don't live vividly in the minds of many today," he said. "But it is important that we remember."



Photo Credit: Billy Wolfe/THE DAILY ATHENAEUM

Left: West Virginia Attorney General Darrell McGraw speaks to a small crowd gathered at Woodburn Circle Thursday in honor of Pearl Harbor Day. McGraw helped get the mast from the USS West Virginia, a ship that was sunk during the Japanese attack on America 65 years ago, placed in front of the Mountainlair. n Right: Veterans Frank Kuhn and Mark Dofkoff ring the bell of the USS West Virginia as part of the Pearl Harbor Day ceremony Thursday morning.

###